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Spotlight on New Milford Schools

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Spotlight on September All About Settling In

The new school year brings adjustments for students and parents alike. The New Milford Public Schools staff is dedicated to making sure the year gets off to a good start. To that end, we asked our school principals to highlight some of their “settling in” activities.

Principal Susan Murray, Northville Elementary School

Northville’s “settling in” activities began on August 22nd when students and parents were invited to meet this year’s teachers, find their desks in their new classrooms, and visit with their friends.

On August 26th, Assistant Principal Jennifer Chmielewski and I welcomed the students to a new school year and led them in the singing of the “Bucket Song” which emphasizes the concepts in the book *How Full is Your Bucket?* which each teacher reads at the start of the year. The book focuses on positive personal interactions and meshes well with the New Milford Public Schools’ focus on ten specific character traits (see *page 5 for a list of these*).



Parents attend Curriculum Night in an NES Kindergarten classroom.

September 10th was Curriculum Night. Each teacher presented a slide show in which grade level curriculum and expectations were explained. Teachers also shared information about the classroom routines and procedures they are currently developing as well as building students’ stamina for independent reading and partner work. Curriculum Night also provided parents the opportunity to

see info about what the Food Service Department offers their children for meals. The PTO was on hand to give parents information about their many projects, encourage membership, and open the school garden, The Plant Patch, for parents to see what their children had planted in the spring.

The PTO sponsored the Welcome Back Family Movie Night and Book Fair on September 12th. Families set up lawn chairs and blankets on the playground and watched “Monsters University” on a large inflatable screen under the beautiful starry night sky. A mini book fair was also open for the purchase of children’s books. The PTO had a membership table to encourage parents to sign up and support the many projects they sponsor in order to provide teacher grants and cultural arts experiences at the school.

Finally, students are “settling in” to the Plant Patch. The school garden is in full bloom at the start of the school year. After hosting a PTO meeting in the garden and welcoming parent visitors on Curriculum Night, PTO volunteers helped students harvest carrots, potatoes, peas, and tomatoes. Each student was able to take home vegetables to share with their families. Later the pumpkins will be harvested for classroom activities such as weighing, measuring, carving, eating, and even watching as some pumpkins are set outside to decompose.

Principal Paula Kelleher, John Pettibone Elementary School

All three elementary schools held their Curriculum Night on September 10th. At JPS, teachers discuss specific curriculum expectations for the grade levels they teach. They welcome volunteers for the classroom and for field trips. Parents get a chance to view the many “getting to know you” displays that the children have worked on in the classroom. These types of activities help children find classmates with similar interests and backgrounds and help the teachers get to know their students as individuals. Teachers and students make class rules and a sense of community is built.

The JPS Welcome Back Event was held on September 18th. Parents worked hard to set up fun activities and baked delicious treats. This year, activities included face painting, a bouncy house, obstacle course, and temporary tattoos. Food included hot dogs and cotton candy. This event is another great opportunity to build a sense of school wide community.



Student work is featured in a
“Getting to Know You” display at JPS.

Principal Len Tomasello, Hill & Plain Elementary School

Hill & Plain Elementary School’s opening was filled with excitement, high expectations and new leadership. Both the assistant principal and I are new to the school this year. Our new arrival procedures allow for students who arrive early in the morning to have an opportunity to play on the playground that is supervised by several staff members. The students are enjoying this time of their day!



New HPS Assistant Principal Jennifer Hankla reads to a grade 1 class.

During the first several days of the year, the new school leaders visited all classrooms to welcome the students back to school. Classroom teachers spent parts of each day developing classroom expectations and setting learning goals. Many teachers invited their new students to introduce themselves in morning meetings and to share some of their personal interests and/or collections. We also created a special display with photos and brief biographies of all staff members so visitors and students could read about our staff. Many parents read this “Brag Board” and learned

that we are a very talented and experienced staff at Hill & Plain.

Curriculum Night gave parents an opportunity to listen to their child’s teacher speak about the curriculum. The level of parent participation was high and we observed lots of happy faces as the parents left the school. This was also an opportunity for the parents to meet the new school leadership team and to learn more about the PTO.

Our very active and supportive PTO treated the staff to a delicious luncheon early this year. Staff members appreciated the generosity of our PTO and are looking forward to supporting this group’s efforts this year. The PTO has planned a Fall Festival that will take place in early October.

Principal Anne Bilko, Sarah Noble Intermediate School

We are off to a great start at Sarah Noble! August 25th was a terrific day as teachers welcomed students to a new and exciting year, and everyone began the process of settling in. On September 4th our PTO sponsored a wonderful Welcome Back Fun Fest. It was a beautiful night and many students and families came out to enjoy the fun. Our staff had fun too as they joined in the festivities; several teachers were even happily the victims of the dunk tank!

During the week of the 15th, we had two very successful curriculum nights. Many parents came to hear first-hand all that’s happening at Sarah Noble. We were able to give an overview to the parents of all the wonderful opportunities for students such as chorus, instrumental lessons, and Student Council and also introduce some of our staff who are not classroom teachers but work with children each day to make students successful.



Mr. Mumma gets dunked at the SNIS Welcome Back Fun Fest.

Immediately afterwards, parents were invited to their students' classroom to hear about students' curricula and what their students' day is like.

Finally, as our first month is ending we have had our chorus and instrumental music programs begin and our Fall Fitness intramural programs start before school. It's been great to see students engaged and active before they start their school day!

Principal Dana Ford, Schaghticoke Middle School

On August 20th we opened our doors to seventh and eighth grade parents and their students. They were able to find out where their new classrooms for the year were by participating in self-directed walkthroughs. On opening day students participated in team assemblies where they were introduced to their team teachers and reviewed SMS policies. They had some time to greet old friends and meet students new to the school.



SMS students settle in to the LMC.

Our Curriculum Night took place September 11th. We began the evening with the Pledge of Allegiance and a short remembrance of the 9/11/01 event. Parents then followed their student's schedules throughout the evening. Teachers spoke about their classroom expectations and ways in which parents could be supportive of their students at SMS. The PTO Book Fair was very successful and many parents and students found books and supplies in which they were interested.

Principal Greg Shugrue, New Milford High School

One of the best things about the start of each school year is the “newness” of it all. Last year is in the rearview mirror and students are presented with new opportunities to be the best they can be. School administrators reach out to parents and students through email during the summer months. Freshmen are welcomed by student ambassadors at orientation in August. All grades have class meetings within the first week or so of school. The first few activity days give students an opportunity to try out a few clubs before making their selection for the year. Guidance counselors also begin grade level meetings with small groups in September.

Parents get a chance to settle in too. Open House was held on September 18th. This year



NMHS Assistant Principal Marc Balanda welcomes freshmen at their class meeting.

the district is piloting an on-line Parent Portal at the high school which enables parents who wish to sign up to monitor their student's grades, attendance, etc. We have started a monthly newsletter "News and Notes" for students and parents. The high school has its own Twitter account @NMHS_CT as do all the administrators. Those parents who do not have a Twitter account can view all the tweets on-line at the school's website nmhs.newmilfordps.org. Parents seeking more involvement can join the NMHS School Climate Committee or participate in the NEASC self-study process. (For more on NEASC see page 7).

Last year our school communication goal was to increase the level of school to home communications. I'm proud to say that after reviewing the Spring 2014 School Climate survey data, 87% of respondents agreed that they feel well-informed about what is going on in the school. We will continue to focus on the school to home communication this year to get that number even higher.



JPS Builds Community

Character Education

All New Milford Public Schools are proud to incorporate character education into their school day. Each month focuses on one of ten attributes. Parents are encouraged to reinforce these traits at home.

September	RESPECT
October	RESPONSIBILITY
November	HONESTY
December	COMPASSION
January	PERSEVERANCE
February	CITIZENSHIP
March	INTEGRITY
April	LOYALTY
May	COURAGE
June	COOPERATION



NES Inspires



Transition Year Update

The 2014-2015 school year is a year of transition for the New Milford Public Schools as we begin the historic undertaking of closing John Pettibone Elementary School and the reconfiguration of students within our remaining schools. Preliminary preparations are underway.

At its September meeting, the Board of Education approved the contracting of consultants Milone and MacBroom, Inc. to provide technical assistance with redistricting. The firm will update enrollment projections to the present and review classroom utilization in order to establish final school district boundaries for next year to best fit New Milford's student population present and future.

The district has set up a page on its website dedicated to the [Transition Year](#) where related documents are posted and questions of interest to the general public will be addressed. A [timeline of activities for the year](#) can be found there as well as [updated enrollment comparisons](#). There is also a dedicated email address to which questions may be sent: Transitionyear@newmilfordps.org.

Check the [district website](#) regularly for updated enrollment comparisons and other information related to the transition.

	JHS			MS			JES			JES-2		
GRADE	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16
Total PK	39	29	23	27	26	22	31	24	20	95	79	71
K	108	102	102	96	91	79	74	73	81	278	266	262
1	116	109	105	111	97	95	95	78	75	322	284	275
2	110	108	110	109	111	107	91	95	92	310	314	309
3	128	105	112	114	110	109	102	89	89	364	304	313
Total	492	453	455	459	435	412	395	359	365	1344	1247	1230
SJS												
GRADE	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16									
4	341	342	335									
5	343	335	342									
6	371	349	343									
Total	1055	1026	1020									
MS												
GRADE	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16									
7	318	371	366									
8	355	316	314									
Total	673	687	680									
NHS												
GRADE	Actual June 2014	Enrollment 14-15	Enrollment 15-16									
9 ^{***}	365	371	400									
10	352	335	330									
11	358	340	327									
12 ^{**}	338	334	334									
Total	1394	1380	1389									
Grand Total	4466	4349	4334									

Superintendent JeanAnn Paddyfote is hosting several informal parent events under the heading *Sit Down with the Superintendent* where parents are welcome to come and ask questions about the transition and other district happenings. They are scheduled for different days and times in an attempt to accommodate a variety of schedules. The first was held at the Lillis Administration Building on September 24th beginning at 7:30 a.m. The next one will be held at the Lillis building on October 22nd at noon.

On September 22nd the New Milford Town Council approved funding to hire a Project Manager for the transition. This position will provide for a dedicated individual to oversee the project. Responsibilities will include handling all the time sensitive tasks that need to be completed with staff, parents and students to ensure a positive transition. Another important aspect will be communicating progress to all stakeholders through updates on the district website. We will continue to provide updates in future issues of *Spotlight* as well.

New Milford High School Prepares for NEASC Visit

New Milford High School will host some important visitors in the spring of 2015 as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)* comes knocking. Founded in 1885, NEASC is the nation's oldest accrediting association, serving more than 2,000 public and independent schools, colleges and universities in the six states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont and American/International schools in more than sixty nations worldwide. It currently accredits approximately 634 public secondary schools in the six-state region, of which New Milford High School is one.

Every ten years or so, accredited institutions provide evidence to NEASC so that a decision can be made about continued accreditation. NEASC accreditation attests to substantial compliance with established qualitative standards, integrity in statements to the public describing the institution's program, institutional commitment to improvement, and sufficiency of institutional resources.

The ten-year cycle is structured according to:

- Self-study which engages the entire educational community in structured analysis, self-reflection, and planning in response to the standards.

- Peer review which brings discipline and perspective to the process through the observations and judgments of a visiting committee of peers from other schools and colleges, informed by the self-study and based on the standards.

- Follow-up which is monitored by a commission of elected peers and overseen by professional staff to ensure that planned and prescribed institutional change is accomplished.

The self-study process is a lengthy one of approximately 12-18 months, culminating in a visit by the NEASC team. For New Milford High School staff, this means many hours of preparation. Assistant Principal Marc Balanda and Math Department Chair Linda Scoralick are NEASC Co-Chairs for the high school. They spoke to the Board of Education's Committee on Learning members on September 16th about the process.

Mr. Balanda and Ms. Scoralick said the high school staff has been working on its self-study reflection since 2012. Committees were formed to report and provide evidence regarding the high school's adherence to NEASC's seven standards of education:

- Core Values, Beliefs, and Learning Expectations
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment of and for Student Learning
- School Culture and Leadership
- School Resources for Learning
- Community Resources for Learning

In May 2015, a NEASC Visiting Committee will spend three days evaluating the data while meeting with teachers, administrators, students, parents and Board of Education members. They will then share the results of their findings and identify areas of strength along with areas in need of improvement.

Per Mr. Balanda “Continued accreditation is important not only to the school itself but to the community at large. Students are most affected by accreditation since they are the central focus of the educational process. Accreditation assures them that their needs are being met through a quality educational program, that a vehicle exists to correct deficiencies in the school program, that their transfer credits will more likely be accepted should their family move, and that college representatives have the assurance of the quality of their preparation. For the community, accreditation of the high school assures that tax money is supporting a school facility and programs that have been judged worthwhile by an outside team of evaluators. Through the process of evaluation, the community is advised of the strengths, needs, and long-range plans of the school. Finally, the reputation of the community benefits from accreditation since the retention or the loss of accreditation has an effect on local property values.”

The self-study process will continue throughout the year. Parental involvement is welcomed and encouraged. For more information on how to get involved, contact Mr. Balanda at balandam@newmilfordps.org.

*Information about NEASC taken from their website: <https://www.neasc.org/>



***Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week
September 29th to October 3rd***



The Food and Nutrition Services Department

will be celebrating Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week from September 29th to October 3rd. During that week the department will be highlighting several Connecticut grown and manufactured items such as Arethusa Farm yogurt from Litchfield, Chabaso bread and Raggazinos sauce from New Haven, and a festival of vegetables and fruit/juices such as Connecticut grown zucchini, butternut squash, cucumbers, and apples. The event takes place in October as part of National Farm to School Month.

Read more about the program here:

[Farm to School Program](#)



New Milford Public Schools

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Fiscal Services & Operations Director

Mrs. Laura Olson
Pupil Personnel & Special Services Director

Ms. Roberta Pratt
Technology Director

Mrs. Sandra Sullivan
Food Services Director

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National Preparedness Month



Observed every year in September, the 30-day designation of National Preparedness Month serves as a reminder that everyone must take action to prepare for all types of emergencies – events that can affect anyone, anywhere and at any time.

This year, FEMA through its national Ready Campaign, is promoting the 2014 theme

‘Be Disaster Aware, Take Action to Prepare’ by highlighting specific actions individuals and groups can take to prepare for an emergency.

These actions center around four weekly themes or blocks of emergency preparedness:

Week 1:

How to... Reconnect with Family after a Disaster

Week 2:

How to... Plan for Specific Needs before a Disaster

Week 3:

How to... Build an Emergency Kit

Week 4:

How to... Practice for an Emergency

For helpful tips about making a plan, building a kit and games to involve your children in the process go to:

<http://www.ready.gov/september>

The mission of the New Milford Public Schools, a collaborative partnership of students, educators, family and community, is to prepare each and every student to compete and excel in an ever-changing world, embrace challenges with vigor, respect and appreciate the worth of every human being, and contribute to society by providing effective instruction and dynamic curriculum, offering a wide range of valuable experiences, and inspiring students to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

September is